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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

1 November 1955

DRAFT MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

SUBJECT: The "Rockefeller Reports"

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1. The "Rockefeller Reports" are a series of papers analysing European opinion trends before and after the Summit Conference at Geneva.<sup>1/</sup> They are based largely upon the USIA's Barometer Surveys in the principal countries of Western Europe.
2. The Barometer Surveys themselves are published by the USIA on an intermittent basis. They are based on a sample of about 800 in each country drawn up according to the customary practices aimed at getting a reliable cross section. The interviewing is done by contract under local auspices. USIA believe the results to be accurate within five percent.

<sup>1/</sup> One of the papers concern European opinion of Far Eastern questions and some of the papers contain sections on opinion in other areas. In these other areas, the opinions recorded are derived from press and authoritative sources rather than from opinion polls.

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3. The Rockefeller Reports are primarily an analysis and extension of the Barometer Surveys. They consider the trend in opinion, and they draw some general conclusions about the development and state of opinion in relation to US policy. They are, therefore, something more than a flat statement of poll results.

4. In general, the introduction of the Barometer series has been a very valuable development in the intelligence art. It provides a most helpful additional factor for the use of analysts in assessing the results of individual foreign policy moves and the magnitude of some of our foreign policy problems. The Barometer reports constitute a supplemental, and sometimes a corrective, factor to regular Embassy reports, which are always open to error because of the interests and capabilities of the reporting officers.

5. The Rockefeller Reports are an attempt to add something to these Barometer reports, and they contain extensive and highly sophisticated interpretation of opinion data. However, the Rockefeller Reports use the poll data without informing the reader of the size of sample used or the percentage of possible error. For example, in a report of June 11 discussing opinion factors relating to the Summit Conference the following are among the analyses made:

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a. Surveys had shown responses from West Germany, the UK, France, and Italy ranging from 36 to 43 percent in favor of siding with neither the East or West in the cold war, and figures ranging from 40 to 54 percent of responses in favor of neutrality in the event of a hot war between the US and the USSR. It was also pointed out that only half of those favoring neutrality thought their country could in fact remain neutral. This was interpreted by the writer as indicating only "the scope of the desire for neutrality" and an "aspiration" for neutrality at the public opinion level.

b. It is concluded that public opinion in Western Europe "appears to be a compromise between two factors, among others: (a) strong aspirations for 'peace' and hence, in certain circumstances, for 'neutrality'; (b) practical considerations having to do with 'security', among which US defense support looms large".

6. There is, however, always a danger of attempting to draw too many conclusions or too firm conclusions from public opinion surveys, even if one assumes that the poll is technically sound, that is, that the sample is large enough and properly balanced, that the right questions were asked in the right way, etc. One such difficulty lies in maintaining a consistent degree of reserve in interpreting the data.

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The illustrations noted in the preceding paragraph were from the first report, dated 11 June. But the data considered three months later, in a report of 23 September, was not treated with the same care and attention to its limitations. For example, this report states in its introduction:

a. "There is little doubt that the net result (of the Summit Conference) has been a further undermining of the Western Alliance, as represented by NATO, in terms of public opinion support, including the opinion of the more influential upper socio-economic groups.

b. "American foreign policy in general, and US military security in particular, are based on a system of alliance, of which NATO is the most important.

c. "The opinion situation developing in Western Europe appears to challenge the bases of American policies with respect to Europe -- and, in particular, raises the question of whether continuing reliance can be placed on NATO as the core of US-European policy."

7. The above conclusions were evidently based upon a battery of questions asked in August. The pollsters found that the percentage of persons interviewed who knew their country was a member of NATO ranged

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from 43 percent in Germany to 63 percent in Italy. In France 49 percent, and in the UK 60 percent, were aware of this fact. It was also found that the percentage of favorable responses on whether NATO had "done well" ranged from 10 percent in France to 30 percent in Britain, that the number of responses favoring replacement of NATO by a security system to which the US and USSR were both a party varied from 38 percent in Germany, Italy and the UK to 43 percent in France, with only 12-19 percent favoring retention of NATO as an alternative, and that those favoring withdrawal of troops from the continent and overseas bases by the US and UK and Soviet withdrawal to their own borders varied from 44 percent in the UK to 57 percent in West Germany. In the case of the upper socio-economic groups, the numbers favoring NATO were only slightly greater, while the troop and base withdrawal proposition drew greater support from the upper groups in Italy and the UK than from those countries as a whole. There was moreover a 20 percent increase between June and August in the number favoring the hypothetical withdrawal proposition. From all these data it is concluded in the text that attitudes favorable to NATO are by no means "firmly structured in the minds of either the general public nor the upper groups of Western Europe," that NATO "appears highly vulnerable from the opinion point of view," and that "at the least, it appears that the people of Western Europe are now willing to consider security arrangements alternative to NATO."

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8. The data developed from the polls are certainly disquieting on their face, but there are a number of reasons why we do not believe they should on their face be accepted as sufficient reason for the alarming conclusions which are drawn from them:

a. There are no comparable data for earlier periods. It is therefore entirely possible that knowledge of NATO and support for it is greater now than in the past.

b. The polls were taken during the first flush of popular optimism resulting from the friendly atmosphere at Geneva.

c. Much of the sympathy for the broad security arrangements and the troop withdrawal proposition which were postulated could just as well be regarded as a "desire" or an "aspiration," much as the writer interpreted the so-called "neutrality" sentiment which emerged from earlier polls. Moreover the annoyances which normally accompany the presence of foreign troops, and, in the case of West Germany, the clear implications of troop withdrawal for reunification were almost certainly factors in the responses of many of those polled.

d. It is an over-simplification to say that "American foreign policy in general ... (is) based upon a system of alliances." It is true that one very important aspect of American policy is the North

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Atlantic organization, but the fact that this alliance was in response to a threat -- and even at times an imminently dangerous threat -- was always made clear to the USSR and was defended in those terms by European governments before their parliaments. It is natural, therefore, that if the imminence and magnitude of that threat should appear to have receded, the responses to it in terms of maintenance of bases and forces abroad or the substitution of what could be defended as a superior treaty arrangement should be those recorded. This should not, however, necessarily be regarded as an "undermining of the Western alliance." The questions asked were hypothetical propositions which struck a favorable chord in the aspirations of people who were encouraged by the Geneva atmosphere; those questions did not go to basic foundations of the North Atlantic community.

9. We wish to make it clear that we believe there are dangers in the post-Geneva world which we have developed at some length in NIE 100-7-55 (Current World Situation), and we do not wish to minimize the problem of West European opinion, which is obviously in need of careful development. To this end, the Rockefeller Reports provide a number of valuable analyses and insights developed from and going somewhat beyond the base results of the polls upon which they are

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principally based. We detect, however, a natural tendency to build too large a structure of conclusions upon the foundation of such polls. This tendency is kept under scrupulous control in the earlier issues of the Reports. In the later issues, we are disturbed by the drawing of broad implications from what seems to us an insufficiency of data. Some danger therefore exists in furnishing papers of this nature direct from the Rockefeller office to policy-makers unless they are clearly and continuously on notice that such papers represent an analysis of only a fraction of the available evidence.

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